Through My Window

Texts from Different Places

*'Respect for cultural diversity is a core element of 21st century humanism. It is a vital constituent during these times of globalization. No single culture has a universal monopoly. Each and every one can contribute to the consolidation of our shared values'* Irina Bokova - Editorial*UNESCO Courier, December 2011.*



|  |
| --- |
| **Silk Road** |

|  |
| --- |
| *by* [*W.F. Lantry*](http://www.asiancha.com/content/view/1002/315/)  The stage is blank now. Ribbons swirling, smoke illuminated from beneath by red lamps focused on the emptiness, oak boards laid down into a pattern which affords a place to leap and land: the coloured thread of narrative in dance has disappeared.  Those arms, like crane wings catching air, once sheared the curtained wind as if to fly, their lines as straight as quills, or intricate cleft braids whose interwoven motion still cascades like water falling through the wreathed designs we only dreamed could be performed. But she  who danced with careless practiced ecstasy, and gave movement to form, her legs taut springs to carry her along those lights where birds no longer fly, the calligraphs of words written in air by limbs where red silk clings, leapt into space and found no place to land.  We all must fall in pain. I understand. But still I dream of cranes among the reeds, their wings just opening, ready for flight, extended feathers catching sunset light like fingers parting strings of coloured beads, rising a little more with each wingstroke.  http://www.sylviastuurman.eu/birds/favourites/crane1.gif |

|  |
| --- |
| **Siem Reap, Cambodia** |

|  |
| --- |
| *by* [*Greg Santos*](http://www.asiancha.com/content/view/534/236/)  Before stepping into a taxi a young girl struggles to take the city with her:  Warm, sticky air bathing the street market, comforting scent of fragrant rice, pungent odour of dry fish, raw flesh hung on butchers' hooks, squawking of chickens in rusty wire prisons, crescendo of rickshaws, scooters, bicycles; the city she will no longer call home.  As she speeds away, the city recedes into memory, as does the rolling countryside, once dotted by women tending to the paddies, children splashing among water buffalo.  Now, echoes of distant missiles pierce her memories, murders of crows dive into reddened fields.  The faces of Angkor watch sadly as their city crumbles, as another one of their children flees, taking nothing with her but me, gently growing inside.  http://www.studentsoftheworld.info/sites/country/img/23800_CAMBODIA-10083.jpg |

**MUSIC ONCE AGAIN***---Boy 11---*Tanikawa Shuntaro

One day somewhere  
someone played the piano.  
From beyond time and space the sound caresses my ears,  
even now making the air tremble.  
  
A sweet whispering from far beyond─  
I cannot interpret it.  
I can only yield myself to it like trees in the grove  
that rustle in the wind.  
  
When was the first sound born?  
In the midst of the vacuous universe  
like a code that someone secretly sent,  
and enigmatically...  
  
No geniuses 'created' music.  
They merely closed their ears to meaning  
and just listened humbly to silence,  
which has existed from time immortal.  
  
**音楽ふたたび**  
　少年１１  
  
いつかどこかで  
誰かがピアノを弾いた  
時空を超えてその音がいまも  
大気を震わせぼくの耳を愛撫する  
  
はるかかなたからの甘美なささやき  
それを読み解くすべがない  
ぼくはただ身をまかせるだけ  
風にさやぐ木立のように  
  
初めての音はいつ生れたのか  
真空の宇宙のただ中に  
なにものかからの暗号のように  
ひそかに謎めいて  
  
どんな天才も音楽を創りはしなかった  
彼らはただ意味に耳をふさぎ  
太古からつづく静けさに  
つつましく耳をすましただけだ

|  |
| --- |
| **Broken Numbers** |

|  |
| --- |
| *by* [*Sharon Hashimoto*](http://www.asiancha.com/content/view/999/315/) *(Japanese writer)*  Helen swallows her breath as the teacher hands back corrected multiplication quizzes. Mr Taggert peers down at Jamie over spectacle rims, nods while he checks the name, flipping to the next paper in his stack. Beside her, Jamie whispers to Marie, "An eighty-eight! What d'you get?" Helen's shoulders tense: there's a high-pitched whistle as she inhales. Jamie and Marie giggle.  Helen clasps her fingers like a buckle on her lap. Mr Taggert stands in front of her desk, a frown pulling at his puffy cheeks. A "D-" slashes its red across the top of her paper.  Mr Taggert clears a corner and rests his buttocks on the edge of his desk, polishing his glasses with a corner of his suit jacket, "There was only one 100%." He pauses. "I won't say who," but his eyes are on Frances Takata, sitting with neat saddle shoes crossed at the ankles. Her sailor dress has white piping edging the square collar; her straight black hair is pulled back into a crisp ponytail. Frances Takata is the only other Japanese student in the class. Mr Taggert's glance sweeps the room from front to back like a lighthouse beacon, catching both Helen and Frances in the same pass. When the school year and fifth grade began, she and Frances were the top two students.  The bell rings for morning recess. Helen stuffs the test into her math book, hiding the book in the desk's dark cave. She doesn't want to see where she has forgotten a decimal point or carried the wrong number. Mama made her study her mistakes, even in the quizzes in which Helen pulled B+s and low As. But on timed tests, she had to be *fast.* "A D-," Helen sighs. Everyone must know how stupid she is without her mother's help. Fingers rake through her bad perm.  At home, there had been all the drills on addition, subtraction, the multiplication table. Mama would hold up endless flashcards while they sat in the kitchen, the clock ticking towards ten pm, white counters reflecting the glare of the overhead light. Wiping dishes, Helen would repeat "six times seven is forty-two, six times eight is forty-eight, six…" and on until the numbers stuck in her throat. But Mama has a job now. There's no extra study time, just more cooking and clean-up chores.  Helen's handwriting is neat; she once read a part of John Steinbeck's "The Red Pony" in a papery voice without any mistakes. And before Mama started working on the assembly line at ACME Poultry, she would go through their old 1920s World Encyclopaedia and find extra credit projects Helen could do for science. "Watch," she had announced as she lit then dropped a flaming piece of paper into a milk bottle, then placed a hard-boiled egg on top like a stopper. As the fire went out, the vacuum sucked the egg down with a small pop faster than the four times she and her mother had practiced the trick. "Whoa," Michael had murmured, his friends around him nodding. Mr Taggert said, "I commend your initiative," and gave her an A. Egg smell had lingered in the classroom for days. All during the experiment, Frances had watched with her eyebrows pinched together, her lashes flicking at the blue spark of the match.  Arithmetic is hardest. Solving problems at the blackboard, Frances never counts on her fingers. Helen knows she has to calculate her columns right to left in addition, subtraction and multiplication. But long division means left to right and she needs to "estimate." The textbook doesn't explain why she should guess. What is the difference, the secret she's supposed to understand?  Slowly closing the top of her desk, Helen watches Jamie and Marie race out to claim a tetherball pole. Four boys crowd around Michael who hides a Superman comic book beneath his plaid shirt. She inches by Mr Taggert's thick back, his chalk squeaking out the next hour's reading lessons on the blackboard.  "Helen," he says, glancing sideways at her, his voice snagging her from the safety of the hallway. "We need to talk."  \*\*\*  Helen buttons her navy wool coat all the way to the top even though the morning isn't cold. It's May and some girls are already wearing thin cotton dresses. Hands in her pockets, Helen keeps her fingers closed into fists so she won't widen the torn lining her mother was always re-sewing but finally let be—so tired after work and Daddy far away on a fishing boat. As she leans against the play court wall, the constant *whomp* of dribbling basketballs vibrates through the wood.  All around her, girls play four-square and tag. "Mabel, Mabel, set the table," chant the two enders who whip the jump rope faster as they get to the "red hot peppers." Helen lingers near the line of tetherball poles, walking its length. At the last pole, she stops, still seeing the grade book full of red checks and minuses beside her name.  A crow caws overhead. The raucous cry feels like all the questions inside that get tangled or won't come out. "Your grades have dropped," Mr Taggert had told Helen. "You began so well. Is something wrong at home?" He kept asking questions Helen couldn't answer.  Helen looks up to see two blue jays dive bombing the crow, then lets her gaze settle on the second grade portables where Frances Takata plays hopscotch with two other girls. She's talking to the one with long honey-blond hair while the other, stockier girl throws the metal ID bracelet she uses as a marker. The bracelet lands on a yellow line. Helen watches the sailor skirt and ponytail flip and bounce as Frances hops five squares on one leg. The other two girls clap their hands as Frances bends her knee to pick up her marker and complete her turn without a miss.  "Who do you play with?" Helen remembers her mother asking after the first week of school. "Are there other Japanese in class?"  "One," Helen had answered. "Frances is very smart."  Helen's mother had looked up from scooping steaming white rice into their bowls*.* "*Anata wa,"* she had started out. Then Mama had switched to English, "Be her friend. Help each other."  Frances pitches her marker, a chain of linked paperclips, too far to the left. Frances' head swivels towards the girl on her left and her lips mouth the words, "your turn."  Helen thinks Frances means her and starts to take a step forward, but the long-haired girl is jumping, landing with two feet firmly planted in the squares of the hopscotch borders. Then they wave politely to Mrs Pendergast, the fourth-grade teacher they had last year.  Frances never walks to school. Her mother drops her off and picks her up in a light blue Buick. She's the only daughter in a family with four boys. Helen imagines milk and chocolate cookies on a pretty enamel plate waiting for Frances, and every day after school she sits eating them at the end of a huge rosewood dining table. Today, Frances will show her mother the multiplication quiz with the crisp "A" and "Excellent Work" printed in Mr Taggert's bold letters. Frances' mother never helps her. Helen wonders, what is the secret to being smart? If they were friends, wouldn't Frances tell her?  \*\*\*  Helen wants to raise her hand when Mr Taggert asks, "What makes plants green?" She knows the answer is chlorophyll, but six other students lean forward on their desks, shouting "I know," stretching their arms like a picket fence blocking the sun.  Photosynthesis is today's lesson and the black and white diagrams in their science books illustrate the veins running through different leaves: maple, oak, birch. Closing the curtains, Mr Taggert shows slides of leaf-form types: simple, abruptly pinnate, odd-pinnate, twice odd-pinnate. Helen writes down every word her teacher says. But she can't keep up. She only gets the beginning four or five words of his sentences.  "Leaves are like feathers," says Mr Taggert. "There is a pattern and number of leaflets on each side of the stem."  Helen blinks and rubs her eyes when the lights are turned back on. She feels sleepy like her head has been stuffed with cotton.  Frances' index finger taps her chin as if she's doing story problems in her head, her eyes darting back and forth between Mr Taggert and the blackboard. The ponytail sweeps Frances' shoulders like an opening fan and Helen remembers the one time her own short hair had been tightly pulled back in imitation, her tiny stub barely curling under. As if noticing her for the first time, Frances had stared at her and blinked slowly. It had been at the end of the school day. Home again to bring in mail and milk bottles, start a load of laundry, set the table, wash rice for dinner—only after Helen had seen her reflection in the living room mirror, did she notice the untidy tendrils and loose knot askew on her head.  Mr Taggert thumps the pointer into the palm of his left hand. "Everywhere we look around us, we can see mathematical forms and structures." He picks up a piece of chalk to draw a stick character. "We have two ears, two hands, two feet…what else?"  Frances answers loudly, "Our hearts are divided into two ventricles and two auricles."  Giggles escape from Jamie. She slaps one hand over her mouth, the other points to the back of the room. Everyone around Jamie turns to catch a glimpse of Michael, his index fingers pulling down and slanting each of his eyes while his head rolls from side to side.  "What's so funny?" Mr Taggert demands, pivoting to face his students.  The back of Frances' neck slowly grows red, but she doesn't turn around. Helen lays her wrist against her own cheek, surprised it feels so flushed.  \*\*\*  There are fifteen questions for the Chapter Review on Decimals and Percents. Before the exam, Mr Taggert had the class take out blue-lined sheets of paper. Standing with the stack of dittos in the crook of his elbow, he announced, "You have exactly one hour."  Helen rubs sweaty hands against the lap of her jumper. She writes "Helen Kayai" on the top line. The shuffling of paper quickly settles down; Mr Taggert returns to his desk.  Helen frowns at the clock. Jamie is biting her tongue as her pencil erases a number. Behind her, she hears Marie turn back a page. Helen is only on Question 3 and she has forty-five minutes to go. How she performs is important; Mr Taggert had said she could still save her grades, still do better than barely passing. All Helen can remember of his lecture were the words "I expect you to…" There was something about needing to pay attention, to ask for help. Mama said she was putting in overtime because she wanted to show her bosses that she's a good worker. Helen had been up late copying down what she didn't understand. There is so much to remember.  Shaking her head, Helen rereads the exam instructions for the third time. Scooting the second sheet beneath her answers, she can see the chart where she's lightly pencilled in columns—tens, ones, a decimal point, tenths, hundredths, thousandths, ten-thousands. Carefully, she prints her answer: "100.06"  Michael sneezes and blows his nose loudly. Several students look up as Mr Taggert pushes back his chair and rises to walk past the closets and bulletin board. The afternoon sunlight flares through the tall windows and beats against bowed heads. Frances raises her hand to ask Mr Taggert a question.  Helen counts the dots her sharp-tipped pencil has made in a square like the four of a domino. Question 5 asks her to add: 2 + 0.4 + 1.15 + 0.0009. A shadow falls over Helen's answers, and she slides her palm and right arm over the copied textbook charts. The pencil continues to make faint counting marks and finally writes in a sum that Helen immediately tries to erase with short quick strokes.  Mr Taggert says, "Hel-en!" His voice is like a hammer as it strikes the first syllable.  Closing her eyes and sitting straight, Helen imagines that for this instant, she's in a dream, her head rising up like a balloon. But Mr Taggert pulls the notebook paper out from under her spread fingers. The pages slip away. She waits forever for the teacher to speak. Finally, she peeks at him to see her test answer sheet in one large veined hand, her copied notes in the other.  "My students should know better than to cheat," says Mr Taggert. He stacks the pages on top of each other, ripping them in half, then into quarters, then eighths. Finally, he walks away and pitches the pieces into the wastebasket. The room is quiet. "Class," Mr Taggert begins in a stern, throaty voice. He stands, knees locked, hands resting on his hips, elbows pointed to each side of the room. "You have fifteen minutes to finish."  The sound of pencils scribbling increases. The tops of Helen's ears burn, hidden beneath her hair. Everyone keeps their eyes focused on their exams. Marie writes, stooped over and hidden in the cloud of her curls. Frances is the only one who looks straight at Helen. Finally, Frances turns to the clock, then back to her exam.  The blue ditto sheet still sits on Helen's desk. She picks up one piece of paper from those fallen like leaves on the floor. She uses her sleeve to wipe it clean of Mr Taggert's heel mark, then starts again with Question 1.  \*\*\*  "I can't believe she came back to school today," Jamie hisses to Marie. Jamie's plaid lunchbox swings in sync with Marie's scuffed penny loafers. They don't hear Helen's light steps behind them; the hallway is crowded with other classes letting out for lunch. Helen lets herself be swept towards the cafeteria where gravy smells fill the air and utensils clatter against plastic trays. If she keeps her shoulders hunched and her eyes fixed on the floor, she can pretend she's invisible. I didn't cheat, she tells herself over and over again. I used my own answers.  All morning, nobody pays any attention to her. Mr Taggert skips past her, asking Robert and Frances and everyone else to read a paragraph from "The Prince and the Pauper" out loud. Frances stumbles over "lineaments." Mr Taggert corrects her pronunciation and asks her to repeat after him, "lin-i-a-ment, a distinctive characteristic." In social studies, the class is given the hour to work on an essay topic. Helen can't get past her first two sentences. Will Mr Taggert call her up to his desk and escort her to the Principal's Office?  Nothing happens. Maybe nothing ever will. If she pretends everything is normal, won't everyone eventually forget? *I didn't cheat. I only copied down some rules and numbers to help me remember.* She won't get many points on the test, but Helen did three questions before turning in her answers. *Shouldn't Mr Taggert understand that I tried?*  Helen clutches her three pennies for milk tighter. Seven students, some fifth and sixth graders she knows on sight, chatter in the slow-moving line. The Vice-Principal stands beside the new cashier, checking change. Helen pockets her money and slinks past Michael and the wall.  When Michael shouts "Cheater," Helen almost drops her sack lunch. She takes deliberate steps past several tables, trying to act like she doesn't hear. "You're stupid enough to get caught," Michael continues, his rising voice coming from behind.  Helen finds an empty seat just as Simon and Rudy finish half of their meat blanchette and leave. They never speak more than a grunt, but she wonders now what they're thinking. Do they know? Now she wonders if *everyone* thinks she's a cheat.  Helen opens her paper sack and unwraps her sandwich. Peeking between the slices she sees vertically cut Vienna sausages lining the bread. As Helen lifts the sandwich, mayonnaise makes everything slide.  Julianne is the only one left at the table; she stares at Helen. Her jaw drops as she makes a face. "Eww—what are you eating?"  Helen wipes her mouth after each small bite. The bread and cold canned meat taste dry without her milk.  \*\*\*  Helen swallows. How hard she's tried not to cry, blinking and holding back the tears, standing straight in front of her teacher. He'd been disappointed, and angry. The sharp corners of Mr Taggert's letter to her mother poke her palm. It's a stiff oblong and stark white; Helen is afraid to fold the envelope and place it inside her coat pocket. But she doesn't want to carry it out in the open for everyone to see.  What will her mother will say? First, she'll study the words carefully. Mama's fingers will rub the front of her apron.  "Mrs Kayai," is written in block letters across the front. Without touching it more than she has to, Helen places the envelope inside her math textbook where it won't be crushed. In the empty halls of the school, her steps echo.  Three girls stand outside the double doors under the eaves. One door is propped open to let in the fresh spring air. Everyone else scattered for home after the three o'clock bell. The girl with long honey-brown hair speaks to Frances Takata. Helen remembers that she's her own age, but is in Miss Tobias' class. She tells Frances, "Your mom sure is late. Want to walk with us?"  Frances checks both directions on Graham Street, "She wouldn't forget me."  Their voices rebound as if at the end of a tunnel. Helen won't pass by the girls. But there's the nurse's office and the teacher's lounge if she changes her route. In the shadows of the hall, she waits for Frances and her friends to leave.  Sunlight glints on France's black hair as she shifts her books to her hip.  The stocky girl, Becky, sighs and yawns widely, without covering her mouth. Propped against the brick wall, she says in a lowered voice, "The whole school is talking about how *Helen stole* the answers right off of Mr Taggert's desk!"  "And Marie told me Helen sneaks peeks to copy. Marie has to hide her work all the time." The long-haired girl tosses her head.  Dabbing her nose with crumpled Kleenex from her coat pocket, Helen feels her eyes begin to fill. Everything around her looks blurry. Helen sniffs quietly and hugs her books tighter. She feels her knee highs slipping as she sinks to a squat on the cold hard floor.  Turning towards her companions, Frances speaks in a sharp tone, "You're just as bad if you spread rumours."  "Rumours?" Becky demands.  "I saw Mr Taggert take away her paper. I don't know anything about Helen stealing from Mr Taggert's desk or what Marie thinks is going on." Frances' syllables sound clipped—the way Helen's mother sometimes speaks in Japanese.  Becky straightens up, shaking her head.  The long-haired girl twirls and twists a strand of hair. She examines the ends. Helen imagines her looping it around an index finger, playing with her lips. "Why'd she do it, Frances? Aren't both of you Japanese?"  Frances doesn't answer for a long time. She must be looking down the street, Helen thinks. An old Rambler usually parks on the side. The silver paint shows streaks of dirt. The two other girls don't leave. Frances finally says "No, I don't know why."  "She's so…weird," Becky offers. "Her clothes are all pieced together. They never match. And she brings all sorts of funny smelling stuff for lunch."  The long-haired girl adds, "She's not like you."  "*Baka-tari!"*  Helen slowly smiles, knowing the word. *Idiots!* That's what Mama sometimes mutters. She hears Frances stomps her feet on the cracked sidewalk."*Rakko* eyes! *Daikon* legs! You have breath like *natto!"*  Helen feels a small glow. She cocks her head to hear more.  "Frances, what's wrong?"  "Go home, both of you!"  She must like me, Helen tells herself. She stuck up for me. She even talks like my Uncle Ichiro. Slowly smiling, Helen stands, then tiptoes towards the entry way. Peeking past the arch, she spies Frances sitting on the curb. Her books are stacked by her side. A red station wagon drives by, stirring up a small whirlwind of dust. Helen studies the white sweater, its long sleeves neatly cuffed. With the dark-haired girl's back to her, she feels brave. "Frances," Helen calls but her voice cracks so she says it again, louder.  When Frances turns, her face is all straight angry lines.  Helen blinks, then says softly, "*Natto?* I didn't know…"  You're so *stupid!*" Frances explodes, "I didn't know, I didn't know." The ponytail wags back and forth as she mocks Helen. "Mom makes me eat *funyu* just like you do."  Frances jumps off the curb to her full height. For the first time, Helen notices how tiny Frances is. She can see over the other girl's head.  "Do you know how hard it is?" Frances rages. "Being smart for both of us?"  Helen backs up a step. She holds one hand out, fingers lowered and spread apart as if to stop what's coming. She stutters, "I'm really sorry."  "But that doesn't do me any good! Does it, Helen?" Her name on France's lips look like a sneer. Helen can't think of anything to say.  Three blocks down, a blue sedan takes a right-hand turn onto their street. Frances swivels toward it, away from her. Helen stares down at her feet, at the long legs of their shadows. The cracks in the sidewalk seem to widen.  The Buick pulls silently to the curb. A woman, her black hair worn in a short bob, leans out the window. "You must have been so worried, Frannie. The dentist was running late and Bobby has to have braces." Then she looks at Helen. "I'm so glad you had your friend to keep you company. Is this Helen?" Mrs Takata smiles brightly. "Can we give you a ride home?"  For a moment, Helen imagines Frances saying "Come on, then." Japanese are supposed to help Japanese, that's what Mama always says. Helen sees herself sliding onto the backseat. With Mrs Takata there, Frances can't help but forgive Helen. In fact, Helen hopes, this is the day they become friends.  But instead, Frances sweeps up her books, opening the front door and climbing in quickly. "No, Mom. She has to go somewhere on her own."  Mrs Takata's mouth makes a small "oh." "Then we'd better get going. Goodbye," Frances' mother waves as the Buick pulls away.  Helen counts backwards from ten, watching the sedan grow smaller. The speck of blue disappears. Clutching them hard, Helen presses her books against the ache in her stomach. No one is around to help her, except herself. All she can do is the same thing every day: walk to school, sit quietly at her desk. Stay invisible. Inside her winter coat, she shivers. She closes both eyes. Through the lids, she sees the sun's red glare.  **Took The Children Away** - Archie Roach  <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aywDT6yHMmo>  This story’s right, this story’s true I would not tell lies to you Like the promises they did not keep And how they fenced us in like sheep Said to us come take our hand Sent us off to mission land Taught us to read, to write and pray Then they took the children away, Took the children away The children away Snatched from their mother’s breast Said it was for the best Took them away.  The welfare and the policeman Said you’ve got to understand We’ll give to them what you can’t give Teach them how to really live Teach them how to live they said Humiliated them instead Taught them that and taught them this  And others taught them prejudice You took the children away The children away Breaking their mother’s heart Tearing us all apart  Took them away  One dark day on Framlingham Came and didn’t give a damn My mother cried go get their dad He came running fighting mad Mother’s tears were falling down Dad shaped up he stood his ground  He said you touch my kids and you fight me And they took us from our family Took us away They took us away Snatched from our mother’s breast Said this is for the best Took us away  Told us what to do and say Told us all the white man’s ways Then they split us up again And gave us gifts to ease the pain Sent us off to foster homes As we grew up we felt alone Cause we were acting white Yet feeling black  One sweet day all the children came back The children came back The children came back Back where their hearts grow strong Back where they all belong The children came back Said the children came back The children came back Back where they understand Back to their mother’s land The children came back  Back to their mother Back to their father Back to their sister Back to their brother Back to their people Back to their land  RoachArchie1aAll the children came back The children came back The children came back Yes I came back |

[](http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_orEkbKGD5z8/TAWoi3CRLUI/AAAAAAAAA5E/-8x5miTJfyo/s1600/thechief.gif)**Chief Seattle**

*Chief Seattle (more correctly known as Seathl) was a Susquamish chief who lived on the islands of the Puget Sound. As a young warrior, Chief Seattle was known for his courage, daring and leadership.*

**Chief Seattle's Letter**  
  
The President in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land. But how can you buy or sell the sky? The land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them?   
  
Every part of the earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every meadow, every humming insect. All are holy in the memory and experience of my people.   
  
We know the sap which courses through the trees as we know the blood that courses through our veins. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters. The bear, the deer, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the dew in the meadow, the body heat of the pony, and man all belong to the same family.   
  
The shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water, but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you our land, you must remember that it is sacred. Each glossy reflection in the clear waters of the lakes tells of events and memories in the life of my people. The water's murmur is the voice of my father's father.   
  
The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. They carry our canoes and feed our children. So you must give the rivers the kindness that you would give any brother.   
  
If we sell you our land, remember that the air is precious to us, that the air shares its spirit with all the life that it supports. The wind that gave our grandfather his first breath also received his last sigh. The wind also gives our children the spirit of life. So if we sell our land, you must keep it apart and sacred, as a place where man can go to taste the wind that is sweetened by the meadow flowers.   
  
Will you teach your children what we have taught our children? That the earth is our mother? What befalls the earth befalls all the sons of the earth.   
  
This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.   
  
One thing we know: our God is also your God. The earth is precious to him and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its creator.   
  
Your destiny is a mystery to us. What will happen when the buffalo are all slaughtered? The wild horses tamed? What will happen when the secret corners of the forest are heavy with the scent of many men and the view of the ripe hills is blotted with talking wires? Where will the thicket be? Gone! Where will the eagle be? Gone! And what is to say goodbye to the swift pony and then hunt? The end of living and the beginning of survival.   
  
When the last red man has vanished with this wilderness, and his memory is only the shadow of a cloud moving across the prairie, will these shores and forests still be here? Will there be any of the spirit of my people left?   
  
We love this earth as a newborn loves its mother's heartbeat. So, if we sell you our land, love it as we have loved it. Care for it, as we have cared for it. Hold in your mind the memory of the land as it is when you receive it. Preserve the land for all children, and love it, as God loves us.   
  
As we are part of the land, you too are part of the land. This earth is precious to us. It is also precious to you.   
  
One thing we know - there is only one God. No man, be he Red man or White man, can be apart. We ARE all brothers after all.

**Du Fu (China: 712 – 770)**

Du Fu (also known as Tu Fu) wrote in the High Tang period. His work is very diverse, but his most characteristic poems are autobiographical and historical, recording the effects of the An Lushan Rebellion of 755 on his own life.

**Nocturnal Reflections While Travelling**

Gentle breeze on grass by the shore,  
The boat's tall mast alone at night.  
Stars fall to the broad flat fields,  
Moon rises from the great river's flow.  
Have my writings not made any mark?  
An official should stop when old and sick.  
Fluttering from place to place I resemble,  
A gull between heaven and earth.

**Qiang Village (3)**

The flock of chickens starts to call wildly,  
As guests arrive, the chickens begin to fight.  
I drive the chickens up into the tree,  
And now I hear the knock on the wicker gate.  
Four or five elders from the village,  
Ask how long and far I have been travelling.  
Each of them brings something in his hands,  
We pour the clear and thick wine in together.  
They apologise because it tastes so thin,  
There's no-one left to tend the millet fields.  
Conscription still continues without end,  
The children are campaigning in the east.  
I ask if I can sing a song for the elders,  
The times so hard, I'm ashamed by these deep feelings.  
I finish the song, look to heaven and sigh,  
Everyone around is freely weeping.

**Thinking of My Brothers on a Moonlit Night**

The army drums cut off human travel,  
A lone goose sounds on the borderland in autumn.  
Tonight we start the season of White Dew,  
The moon is just as bright as in my homeland.  
My brothers are spread all throughout the land,  
No home to ask if they are living or dead.  
The letters we send always go astray,  
And still the fighting does not cease.

**The Last Warrior -** W.J. Bruce

High on bleak, stony rag,

Unmoving, he sits astride

His ragged coated pony.

Only tell-tale frozen breaths,

Separate them from

The still, winter black boles

Of ancient leafless trees.

The pony, blown and lame,

Stands with lowered head,

Ears flattened to the sound

Of a distant wolf pack.

The man on his back,

All weapons lost,

Ignores the trickling blood

From savage wounds,

Mingling his war paint.

Eyes burning fiercely

He strains to find

The sign he seeks:

Behind, the sound of enemy

Draws ever closer.

At last, faith rewarded,

He sees far below

In the deep valley,

Arriving at the edge

Of the fast flowing river,

The great she bear

With two gamboling cubs:

To fish the racing salmon,

Drawn relentlessly toward

Their age-old spawning ground.

Silently, the wounded brave

Offers his final prayer

To the eternal clan bear;

Totem and guardian

Of his battle slain tribe.

The enemy, exultant,

Are almost upon him,

Yet he looks not behind:

He sees only the Great Spirit,

Surrounding him kindly

In loving, firm embrace.

While the enemy closes in,

He straightens himself;

His voice rings loud and clear,

Echoing across the land

To the distant cloudless sky.

One last defiant war cry

As he spurs on his pony,

And leaps...

Into the world of his ancestors.

**Wang Wei** (699-759 AD)

**Green-Water Stream**

To reach the Yellow-Flowered River

Go by the Green-Water Stream.

A thousand twists and turns of mountain

But the way there can’t be many miles.

The sound of water falling over rocks

And deep colour among pines.

Gently green floating water-plants.

[](http://www.google.com.au/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=Wang+Wei+(699-759+AD)&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&docid=S9MLCVsOvKqmfM&tbnid=-Xrg3_Avds-eRM:&ved=0CAUQjRw&url=http://www.thisworldwelivein.com/2012/11/05/bamboo-and-plum-blossom-wang-wei-699-759/&ei=h74lUbvDLPDtmAWuooDwDg&bvm=bv.42661473,d.dGY&psig=AFQjCNH-D2N00qhEIai6eo_TJy0XOaY32w&ust=1361514482373314)Bright the mirrored reeds and rushes.

I am a lover of true quietness.

Watching the flow of clear water

I dream of sitting on the uncarved rock

casting a line on the endless stream.

**Pa Pass**

At daybreak I head for Pa Pass.

Spring and I together leave Ch’ang-an.

A woman washes clothes in bright water.

The birds at dawn sing in the light.

River country. Boats here are markets.

Mountain bridges cling to treetops.

Climbing up, a hundred villages.

In the far sun the Two Rivers.

People here speak another language,

But the birdsong’s just like my country’s.

Understanding the depths of landscape,

Even here I am never lonely.

**Drifting**

September skies are clear to the distance

Clearer still so far from human kind.

A heron by the pool, a mountain cloud,

Either of them makes the mind content.

The faintest ripples still and evening are here.

The moon turns silver and I dream,

Tonight leaning on a single oar,

Drifting without thought of going home.

# Yoko Danno – III

**A Serpent, A Tornado**  
  
  
Counting the fragments

in unspoken prayer,

I stared at the broken *raku* tea bowl, fit to my hands with use for years—a gift to me  
from a friend who had found it in an antique shop in Kyoto. I could have it repaired  
with gold dust lacquer, which would have added a new aspect of beauty to the bowl.  
But instead I put the fragments in a wooden box where I had collected broken pieces  
of stone, glass, tile, ember, shell, bone, wood, cloth, leather, odds and ends, hoping  
that someday I could piece them all together into an organic collage.  
  
  
I had failed to shut tightly the hinged glass doors of the cupboard the night before  
the earthquake, registered M7.3 on the Richter scale, which severely shook this  
area at dawn. In my bed I pulled the blanket over my head and put up with the 20-  
second-violent shake. Tremendous energy was discharged. The earth really meant it.  
Most of the tiles slid down from the roof of my house. Dishes, plates, cups, bowls,  
glasses in the cupboard fell from the shelves and broke. Pieces of glass flew in all  
directions. Finally I got up enough nerve to slip out of the bed for a cup of hot green  
tea, but the tap water and town gas were unavailable, and above all it was  
dangerous to walk barefoot in the kitchen.  
The sun was declining

subdued as if seen through

a frosted glass lampshade,

as I walked downtown afterwards. The air was dense with dust, smelling faintly of  
gas. Enormous energies, released from the crushed wooden houses, pressed human  
bodies and crumbled concrete buildings, were rising in a vortex—

a dark

serpent, a

tor-nad-do

a huge

trumpet

of

lily

support-

ing

the

threat-

en-ing

skies

Dusk was thickening into night. Cold flames were leaping at my feet. I had a vivid  
sensation as if my body were falling apart. I was aware that I was in a dream, but I  
repeated frantically, “namu-amida, namu-amida,” calling for help from Amitabha  
the Infinite Light. I feared if I stopped chanting, my body wouldn’t be able to stay in  
one piece, so I kept on until I felt safe and whole.  
  
Toward daybreak I woke up and went into the kitchen. The rich perfume of white  
lilies emanating from the broken crystal vase brought me to my senses.  
  
(The Earthquake of Kobe in 1995)

[](http://www.google.com.au/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=the+earthquake+in+kobe+1995&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&docid=rP9TV7icCDpODM&tbnid=A-Nvb0Wxmx-zIM:&ved=0CAUQjRw&url=http://angkut.net/&ei=3sAlUdiyDMf6mAW3-YHoAw&bvm=bv.42661473,d.dGY&psig=AFQjCNHr25MYAF5C6ymB7apbWIJjjph8Iw&ust=1361515074133924)

**Suggested Texts to Explore**

**Websites**

<http://www.asiancha.com/> - Asian poetry, creative non-fiction and fiction.

<http://poetrykanto.com/> - Asian poetry and prose

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/specials/mama-asia/> - Access stories from inspirational women from across Asia

Dust Echoes: <http://www.abc.net.au/dustechoes/> - Aboriginal myths

Aboriginal Poetry: <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/arts/aboriginal-poems.html>

**Novels**

*A Step from Heaven*, An Na

*Bound*, Donna Jo Napoli

*Hanaʼs Suitcase*, Karen Levine

*Chalkline*, Jane Mitchell

*Maoʼs Last Dancer*, Li Cunxin

*Two Pearls of Wisdom*, Alison Goodman

*The Blood Stone,* Gavin Jamila

*My Girragundji*, Meme McDonald and Boori Monty Pryor

*The Running Man,* Michael Gerard Bauer

***The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian,*** Alexie Sherman

*American Born Chinese*, Yang, Gene Luen

**Films**

*Whale Rider*

*Spirited Away*

*Grave of the Fireflies*

*The Secret of Roan Inish*

*Howl’s Moving Castle*

*Kundun*

*The Cup*

*Sumo Do, Sumo Donʼt*